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ABSTRACT

Different views of the purposes of literacy are among the factors that influence success rates of students from different backgrounds. Research involving non-mainstream English proficient children is useful in understanding the adjustment of students with limited or no English proficiency. Although previous experience with literacy is an important variable in teaching literacy in English, literacy teaching does not necessarily depend on mastery of the spoken language in which the student is becoming literate. Because of the mismatch between teacher expectations and child behavior that may occur both when the teacher and child share a native language or when their native languages differ, educational programs must accommodate to the cultural influences children bring to the classroom. Writing needs to be approached as both a vehicle of personal expression and as a way for students to develop editing skills, thereby promoting a more general awareness of language and helping to lessen some of the discrepancies between teacher and student expectations. Both spoken and written language skills may be advanced by dividing students into small groups in which peer-tutoring is a continuous practice. Culturally appropriate small group activities and teaching techniques are presented in the appendix. (JK)

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A MULTI-SKILL APPROACH TO ESL IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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Suzy(3 years;2 months): Wanna hear my book?
Wanna see my book?
Read my book.

Nani(2 years;10 months): Oh yeah. Read the book.

Although these two children have not yet learned to read, they have definite ideas about what can be done with books. A further illustration occurred when one of the children, Nani, asked that a story be "read" to her even though she knew that there were no books available at the time (Iwamura 1980:93). In both situations, the children related the idea of "book" and the idea of "story"; a book (or a story) could be read, seen, or heard. They also knew that books were one source of stories, but that stories were not dependent on books for their existence.

Suzy and Nani are being socialized into literacy. These examples show that the girls knew at least one of the purposes of books and that reading, speaking, and hearing are activities that can be associated with books. Their failure to differentiate among these activities is unlikely to detract from their interest in learning to become literate.

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Not all children come to school with the same ideas about books as these two children. In fact, recent research in the adjustment of minority children to school suggests that different views of the purposes of literacy are only one of a number of important factors that seem to influence the success rates of students from different backgrounds. Most research in this area has focused on native speakers of dialects other than standard English rather than on children who come from backgrounds in which a language other than English is used. However, research involving non-mainstream, English proficient children has suggested questions which are likely to be useful in understanding the adjustment of students with limited (or no) English proficiency. Some work which focuses on the latter group has been started and results suggest that adjustments in educational programs and methods which would benefit children who speak non-standard dialects might also be appropriate to children who speak other languages.

In this paper, I will discuss some of this research as well as relevant work in the areas of language acquisition and language processing. I will relate this to using all of the four skills--reading, writing, speaking, and listening--which (as Suzy and Nani told us at the beginning of this paper) are not as easily separable as we might think. Finally, I will describe teaching procedures which are consistent with recently developed assumptions about language learning and language function.

These procedures can be applied to designing materials and coordinating classroom activities.

When three-year-old Suzy treats hearing, seeing, and reading a book as one and the same activity, she reveals a view of language and reading that contradicts what many educators seem to believe. The result of such a view on the part of educators can be seen in schools where different periods are assigned for reading, writing, and (occasionally) speaking and listening, and in programs for college students and adults where semester-long courses are called "Listening Comprehension," "Writing", and "Reading".

Widdowson points out that both language courses and language teaching materials tend in general to consist of units in which skills are divided and are almost never systematically connected. In fact, the contents of one unit involving one skill may require the student to know material that a parallel unit on another skill is just beginning to teach(1978:144-5).

Accompanying the sharp division of skills in many educational programs is the belief that of the four skills, the oral skills--speaking and listening--are primary. In some circumstances, the absence of oral language is considered evidence of total lack of language.[1] Until recently, in public schools in Hawaii and presumably elsewhere, knowing

a language simply meant performing at a certain level on an oral examination. This type of test continues to be a major instrument for determining which immigrant students should enter ESL and/or bilingual classes. It is also used along with other tests and teacher evaluation to determine the point at which a student can discontinue attending such classes. Teachers are so concerned about students' performance on the oral language test (in this case, the Bilingual Inventory of Natural Language--the BINL) that they tend to judge every method and all materials in terms of "Will this get my students BINLed out?"

The assumption that oral language is primary in both time--that it will be the first form learned--and importance--that it must be mastered before other forms--is expressed in a number of places. For example, Fishman (1973), in arguing that bilingualism cannot exist without literacy in both languages, clearly assumes that oral language will be mastered in both languages without special efforts; therefore what he must encourage is the teaching of the written forms of the non-English language. The assumption that spoken language comes first is also reflected in this comment by Newmark(1972:610): "How one teaches people to write a foreign language depends on their literacy in another language and on their mastery of the spoken language in which they are learning to become literate."

While I agree that previous experience with literacy is an important variable in teaching literacy in English, I do not believe the latter goal depends on mastery of the spoken language in which the student is becoming literate. On one hand, second language learning is often seen as a replay of first language learning; that is, you have to master listening and speaking first. On the other hand, however, there is counterpressure from other sources to question the value of oral language. In spite of the fact that most teachers seem to believe the first you have to do is to get non-native speakers moving their mouths in English-like ways, these same teachers have a deep suspicion that vocal language is somehow inferior. "Good, correct" English is popularly known as the language you find in books. Children who speak a dialect other than "good" English are also often those who, because they come from certain ethnic and socio-economic groups, are considered more likely to fail at school than children who come from groups which do speak "good" English.

A growing body of research has been attempting to discover why children from some groups are more likely to succeed in schools than children from other groups. Some of findings of this research suggest that oral language has

special functions in the classroom. I believe the acceptance of these particular functions is another reason for the emphasis on the teaching of spoken language as the first step in helping non-native students adjust to school.

Interest in the adjustment of minority children to school focused on language in Labov's work with Non-Standard Negro English (1969) and Bernstein's development of the notion elaborated and restricted codes (1964). Since then, researchers like Gumperz (1977) and Hymes (1974) have pointed out that looking at language in a limited sense is only part of the problem. What we must also consider is the nature of the child's communicative competence on one hand and the kinds of language and interaction that are expected in the schools on the other.

These two lines of inquiry have been pursued by a number of researchers. Some have studied interaction within the classroom (Cook-Gumperz 1978). Others have looked closely at the development of communicative competence in young children (Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan 1977). Scollon and Scollon (1979) described "incipient literacy" in their pre-school child and identified patterns she displayed which illustrated what she had learned about book-reading and about how to present knowledge gleaned from books. Heath (1980) found similar patterns in her study of literacy socialization in "mainstream" household

Both studies found that spoken language is used by children and their parents to discuss information found in books. By encouraging narratives and engaging in certain types of dialogues, parents provide children with practice in handling routines that are parallel to classroom interactions.

One illustration of the difference between mainstream and non-mainstream households can be found in the apparently simple process of asking and responding to questions. This can be viewed on two levels. One level is the pragmatic function of the question in a given context. The second is the act of asking questions. In the case of the first level, we must look at the practice teachers adopt of asking questions for which they obviously know the answer. For a child who has engaged in question-answer dialogues with parents or peers where everyone knows the answer (e.g. "What did the papa bear say then?"), this activity can easily be transferred to a school setting where the teacher's objective is to find out what the child knows. But, for children who have been exposed to functions of questioner-answerer dialogues which did not include dealing with information that both the questioner and the answerer know--that is, situations where questions were asked only when the questionner needed the information asked for--the behavior exhibited by the teacher when she or he clearly knows the answer may seem absurd and impractical.

If we look at the second level mentioned above--the act of directing a question to an individual child--we are in an area where research shows that children from some non-mainstream backgrounds clearly respond negatively to being picked out and addressed by the teacher. Boggs (1972) found that Hawaiian children responded to a teacher in opposite ways depending on whether questions were addressed to the whole class or to an individual child. The difference was startling because the same child who might volunteer eagerly when he was treated as part of the group might refuse to answer if he was called on individually and thus received the direct attention of the teacher. This behavior is very likely to affect the quality and quantity of success with which the Hawaiian children are able to participate in classroom activities.

If such illustrations of mismatch between teacher expectations and child behavior can be found when the children's native language is the same as (or variety of) the teacher's, how much greater the effect of mismatch must be when the native languages of the child and the teacher are also different. Aspects of Hawaiian culture such as those described by Boggs are being taken into account in the development of the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP). Jordan believes that "one reason the (KEEP) program works

as well as it does is that, at many points, it is accommodated to" Hawaiian culture (1980:1). By accommodation, Jordan means that the culture of the children is a factor in the selection of teaching practices (1980:3).

If Jordan is correct in her belief that the chances of an educational program succeeding are heightened by such accommodation to the cultural influences that children bring with them into the classroom, then we must learn about these influences in the cases of children whose native language is not English in order to select appropriate teaching practices for them.

Two examples of where such inquiry might take us come from a paper by Fillmore(1980). She describes two groups of children: Mexican and Chinese. The first group is peer-oriented and socially sufficient. They participate eagerly in conversation with peers, but are reluctant to speak with adults. Chinese children, on the other hand, are more adult-oriented. They focus more readily on conversation with adults. Also, they have been observed by Fillmore and others to be able to concentrate for long periods of time and memorize easily and readily.

Another example which illustrates the diversity of culturally influenced behavior in the classroom has been described by Pablo (1980) in her study of the help-seeking

behavior of Ilokano children in a classroom in Hawaii. Pablo discovered that the type of behavior that a child might exhibit when he or she was trying to get the teacher's attention in order to ask for help was exactly the kind of behavior that the teacher found useless or distracting. While the child was trying to be polite by not approaching the teacher directly, the teacher, expecting a direct appeal for help, saw the child's activity as simply not trying, or not working or worse.[2]

While it is clear that further research along the lines of Pablo and Fillmore is needed, there are some directions that teachers might consider in accommodating at least partially and tentatively to the cultures of non-mainstream and non-English proficient children. In the area of classroom management, for example, teachers depend heavily on oral communication to control what goes on in the classroom. It follows in an obvious way that this method of classroom management will succeed only if oral communication is possible. As I have suggested above, oral communication is more than simply a question of language. However, this does not seem to be widely understood as witness the problems of non-mainstream children in responding to oral instructions in a manner that teacher expect (Boggs 1979). If, as seems to be the case, most teachers depend on oral communication to manage what happens in their classrooms, then the emphasis on teaching

spoken language first must gain support for this reason as well as for the reasons discussed above.

Of course, this does not mean that oral communication is the only goal. Written communication (reading and writing) are part of most programs at some point. However, even when the final objective is mastery of the written as well as the spoken language, the assumption is that spoken language is the means to the end as well as an end in itself. The reverse is not the case. That is, written language is seen as an end in itself but is not usually viewed either as a communicative tool or as way of learning more about language in the same sense as spoken language is.

With the exception of courses such as creative writing and journalism, writing has two purposes in school--at least as far as student production is concerned. One of these purposes is composition--mastery of certain forms of written language--an end in itself. The second is reporting what one knows--either in the form of a test or a report such as a term paper. In both composition and evaluation the teacher is an evaluator, never the receiver of simple communication. What seems to be left out of consideration is the notion of writing for the sake of communicating--a function which is taken for granted when one thinks about spoken language. This

may be a serious omission in dealing with students who, because they are not comfortable talking directly with the teacher in any language, might respond to the teacher's interest in what they have to communicate in their writing. For such students, writing in English may be a more useful tool than speaking, especially at the early stages of language learning.

For the current discussion, I will leave the distinctions between types of composition and functions of writing to sources such as Anderson and Konneker (1981, especially chapter 3). What I will focus on here is writing not only as an end in itself, but also as a vehicle for expression of personal thoughts and as a way for students to develop what might be called "editing skills". That is, writing is likely to lend itself more readily to conscious correction than any of the other skills. In writing, the learner has the opportunity to look at the language he has just produced and to determine whether he finds it acceptable and error-free. He can use whatever information and experience he has been able to amass up to that time. Sources of experience and information are expected to vary from writer to writer, but the process--which might be called editing--is the same. This notion is expressed in the following comment from a second language learner: "For one thing, sometimes I would write the way I speak. We say a word more or less in a careless way. But

if I take my time, sometimes go over it, that would be much easier" (Cohen and Robbins 1976:58).

In my work in first language acquisition, I described young children engaged in self- and other-correcting activities in the areas of pronunciation, syntax, and lexicon. These children were exhibiting what I called "metalinguistic awareness"--the manipulation of specific aspects of language not related to expression of meaning per se (Iwamura 1980, especially chapter 4). Such manipulation of language as exhibited in correcting activities is no doubt an important aspect of the learning of both first and second languages. Classroom activities which encourage constructive and natural self-correction as well as other-correction operate in a number of complex ways. Some of these such as writing may vary in their focus from content orientation to form or language orientation. Writing, of course, has the advantage of not only promoting the development of editing skills and a more general awareness of language itself but also can circumvent some of the discrepancies between teacher and student expectations.

The particular discrepancy I think of in this context is the value placed on silence, especially when a young person

faces an adult. In several of the cultures from which imigrant students come (including the Ilokano children studied by Pablo), this is a powerful element and has clear effects on the students' behavior. It probably accounts in part for the superiority of some immigrant students' writing over their speaking ability as reported by many of the teachers I have talked to. If this is the case, as I strongly suspect it is, the traditional bias in favor of teaching oral language first will come into conflict with what would be best for these children. At the same time, conventional classroom procedures that involve direct questioning of individual students will be inappropriate for the child who is oriented toward written forms of language rather than oral forms and also for the child who is peer-oriented and responds better to questions directed toward a group.

The program developed for Hawaiian primary school children at the Kamehameha Early Education Program provides examples of "culturally appropriate instructional events" (Au 1980). One of these events is group interaction of a

type that has been observed in the homes of the children. Teachers and researchers at KEEP refer to this type of interaction by the same name it bears in the community: "talk story". It is considered one of the activities which lead to learning.

In designing materials and choosing methods for teaching English to students in bilingual programs, we must consider which instructional events would be culturally appropriate to the target groups. At the same time, we must re-examine the belief that oral English must come first.

One instructional event that has met with success in some settings is group discussion. Such discussion may or may not be the same as the "talk story" that is part of the KEEP program, but it has several advantages that go beyond cultural appropriateness. One such advantage is that it can be used to improve comprehension. If students have the opportunity to share knowledge, they may be able to help each other. This might be accomplished in the students' native language even if the teacher cannot speak that language.

By comprehension, I mean a broad sense of understanding--not simply being able to respond to specific questions or to expound on a given topic since these are skills in themselves. In many cases, the kind of understanding that goes on in such

groups may not be readily observable at first. It can, however, provide students with an opportunity to compare what each of them thinks is going on in the classroom. Specific tasks can be assigned to small groups. These might include peer translation of what the teacher has just said, discussion of a particular reading passage, or planning a project in a content area such as math or science. (See appendix for an informal outline of small group activities.)

An area of considerable flexibility concerns interaction among groups, between each group and the teacher, and between a group and the rest of the class. Groups composed of students who speak the same non-English language can be given tasks where the use of the non-English language can support an understanding of material (oral or written) presented in English. This would involve interaction within the group. Groups could then practice doing the same job in English. The next step can be to mix groups so that members of each group have only English as a language in common. From there, groups can choose leaders to explain to other groups what their group has just discussed. Clearly, there are a number of variations that can provide students with opportunities to focus on understanding in different modes. The goal should be the use of small groups and peer interaction--not as a sometime activity, but as a constant and continuous aspect of classroom procedure. I have heard of instances where students are encouraged to talk even while the

instructor is talking. Although this is somewhat disconcerting to a teacher who is not used to it, the results in terms of student comprehension[3] are reported to be excellent.

One of the activities which can be encouraged within groups is writing. This can benefit both students who already write and those who have never been literate in any language. Those who are non-literate will be able to find out how it feels to hold a pencil and make a mark on paper. This may seem extremely primitive, but a number of recent refugees have never attended any kind of school before and their lack of experience must be considered in supporting their transition into a school setting.

Those students for whom writing and reading are more comfortable activities than speaking and listening can be coaxed into speaking activities when their audience is a small group of peers rather than the teacher or the whole class. Some very shy students may need to spend some time talking about specific school assignments in their native language before they will be able to carry on discussions in English with peers. Gradually they can make the transition from speaking to a small group to speaking to the teacher and the whole class in English.

In conclusion, we have seen that there seems to be a general belief that oral language production and comprehension are primary both because people believe that you must speak before you read and write and because teachers depend on spoken language to coordinate classroom activities. It is also the case that even when students are native speakers of English, they may not respond to spoken language in ways that teachers expect; students and teachers may not have the same ideas about the functions of language in the classroom. We can expect even greater discrepancies between non-native students and teachers who differ not only in native language but also in cultural background. I propose the following teaching practices as guidelines to begin to accommodate what happens in the classroom to the needs and cultures of some groups of immigrant students.

1. Early use of reading and writing
2. Use of native languages for specific purposes--even (or especially) when the teacher does not know the students' languages.
3. Use of small groups and peer-tutoring as a continuous aspect of classroom procedure.

Appendix : Small group activities

I. Peer help on a specific assignment.
   A. Cloze procedure
   B. Composition
   C. Reading and following directions
II. Group assignment
   A. One person will represent group and report to whole class
   B. All members of group will present comment or question
III. Ways to choose groups
   A. Count off
   B. Puzzles
   C. Songs
IV. Ways to organize groups
   A. Each group selects chairperson, recorder,etc.
   B. Same language groups use native language for some tasks
   C. Different-language groups use English for some tasks

Notes

1. When children do not respond to any oral test--even one in the language spoken at home--they are considered to have "no language" according to a senior education office in Hawaii.

2. A discussion of cultural patterns that these groups of non-mainstream children encounter in their homes that might predispose them toward the types of behavior we have looked at here is beyond the scope of this paper.

3. This description of a lecture setting at the Chinese University of Hong Kong was provided by Steven M. Dawson, Associate Professor of Finance, University of Hawaii.

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